

Rebates Available for Solar Electric System Assessments

By Michael Keckler, Public Information Officer, Idaho Department of Water Resources

Looking for a way to cut electricity bills? An answer could be shining down upon you right now. Idahoans eager to harness power from the sun can get help from the Idaho Energy Division, which is offering to share some of the early costs.

Through its Solar Electric System Site Assessment program, the Energy Division will pay up to \$175 for a site assessment by a qualified solar electric dealer who can design a system and cost estimate for a home or business. A complete list of qualified solar electric or photovoltaic (PV) dealers is available on the Idaho Energy Division's website: www.idahosolar.org

To participate, select a dealer from the list and schedule a site evaluation. The solar dealer will provide a sun chart for your area, a completed site evaluation form including the cost estimate for installation, and a copy of the Idaho Customer Information Booklet containing lots of useful information about solar energy.

The deal is part of a larger Energy Division sponsored program called the Idaho Solar Initiative that supports the national Million Solar Roofs Initiative launched in 1997. Idaho's MSRI goal is to install 5,000 solar systems by the year 2010, and site assessments are a first step in making that goal a reality.

Funds are limited; meaning about 50 site assessments will be eligible for rebates. They will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. \$175 rebates are available for assessments on sites off-grid, and \$75 rebates for on-grid sites, those connected to an existing power line. Off-grid sites are particularly suited for solar electric power because it is usually much cheaper than extending power lines to a remote site, which can cost tens of thousands of dollars.

Photovoltaic cells convert sunlight directly into electricity. When sunlight strikes a PV cell, electrons are dislodged, creating an electrical current.

In the 1890's, Silver City, high in Southwestern Idaho's Owyhee Mountains, became the first town in the state to be electrified. But during World War II, the power line was pulled out, leaving the historic community in the dark for many decades. Today, more than half of Silver City's buildings – among the oldest in the state – have power again, thanks to roof-mounted PV panels. Many ranchers also rely on PV panels to pump water for cattle in remote locations. Look closely at your calculator or wristwatch; you might see a tiny PV cell there too.

The proposed solar electric system must be located in Idaho and evaluated by a qualified photovoltaic dealer. Existing system upgrades and small solar electric applications, such as for recreational vehicles, do not qualify.

For more information, contact (Ms.) K.T. Hanna at the Idaho Energy Division (208) 287-4898 or k.t.hanna@idwr.idaho.gov

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